DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 396 404 EA 027 630

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TITLE To Train or Not To Train: Implications from Case studies on Factors Affecting the Accelerated Schools Process.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (New York, NY, April 8-12, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Educational Change; Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Organizational Change; *Organizational Climate; Professional Development; *Resistance to Change; *Staff Development
IDENTIFIERS *Accelerated Schools

ABSTRACT

This paper describes two case studies that assessed the effects of staff training in schools participating in the accelerated schools model (Levin 1990). The model stresses the importance of total school-community involvement and shared decision making during all stages of the acceleration process. The two schools included a middle school (grades 7 and 8) and a junior high school (grades 5-8). Data were derived from two questionnaires completed by 27 teachers and administrators at the middle school and by 81 teachers and administrators at the junior high school, informal interviews, and observation. The unique characteristics at both school sites contributed to their failure to fully embrace the accelerated-schools model. At school 1 (the middle school), the principal did not share power with staff. At school 2 (the junior high school), teachers were concerned about time commitment and the immediate impact of the model on student scores. The data indicate that training cannot be effective unless: (1) a community of learners is willing to participate with the understanding that the first year is basically a training/preparation year; (2) the school is totally committed to the process; (3) the school has an administrative and environmental support system; (4) the training team has support from the school administrator; and (5) there is an absence of external forces affecting the school. (Contains 14 references.) (LMI)

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To Train or Not to Train: Implications From Case Studies on Factors Affecting the Accelerated Schools Process

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Introduction

In a recent letter written to coaches (11 December 1995), Henry Levin, director of the National Center for the Accelerated Schools Project, mentioned three issues to which accelerated schools coaches need to pay attention because of the frequency with which they occur: (1) school resistance to change even though the school voted for the Accelerated Schools model; (2) poor leadership at some sites; and (3) a lack of commitment to coaches in providing the time promised for training. Situations of the sort Levin describes carry with them serious implications for decision-making processes when schools request Accelerated Schools training. The study reported in this paper provides data that not only confirms the importance of these issues in the training process but also raises additional matters of concern coaches need to consider in reaching a decision about whether or not to train a school faculty in the accelerated schools process.

Assessing Change

To investigate the phenomenon of change, two case studies were used to assess the effects of the accelerated school's training. Results obtained from the two schools hold implications for future trainers in determining whether or not training is likely to be successful within a given school site. The expenditures of time, effort, resources, and energy on the part of both the trainers and the community of learners suggest the need to ascertain whether or not such expenditures are likely to result in successful implementation before making such a commitment. There are no guarantees, of course, but early indicators may help change agents make important decisions about the feasibility of training.

Donmoyer (1990) provides three advantages of employing case studies: (1) they allow accessibility and permit one to experience vicariously unique situations; (2) they allow one to "see through the researcher's eyes,"-- to see things otherwise not seen; and (3) they can lead to decreased defensiveness from the participants and less resistance to training.

The accelerated schools model (Levin, 1990) represents a strong departure from the top down administrative structure typical

of many school systems. The model stresses the importance of total school community involvement and shared decision-making during all stages of the accelerated process. Change, though, is not always easy to accomplish. Elliot (1991) stated that change often begins with personal conflict frequently revealed through ambivalent feelings, inconsistent behavior, outright resistance, or by superficial attempts to change. Cuban (1984) agrees and asserts that change in schools cannot be separated from the shared and individual beliefs of its teachers.

Perhaps the most important component, though, is the role of the principal. As early as the 1950's, Ross (1951) identified the principal as the key individual in the change process. In the intervening years numerous researchers (Baldridge and Deal, 1975; Barrick, 1988; Brickell, 1961; Fege, 1980) provide additional evidence about the importance of the principal in school improvement efforts. Indeed, Hall (1988) believes that the principal's leadership may well be the key determinant in whether or not school change occurs.

Method

Sample

Study 1 examined a middle school (grades 7 and 8) with an enrollment of 889 students (78.5% white, 11.2% Hispanic, 9.9% African American, and .03 "other.") Forty three and one fourth percent of the student population was considered economically disadvantaged. Study 2 examined an intermediate/junior high school (grades 5-8) with a population of 943 students. Of these, 51.6% were deemed economically disadvantaged and 51.4% were minority students.

Instrumentation

Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used to collect data. Quantitative measures included the School Environment Questionnaire (Fisher & Fraser, 1990) and the Open-Ended Stages of Concern (Newlove & Hall, 1976). The School Environment Questionnaire (SLEQ) is a 56-item quantitative instrument that asks respondents to think about their school and working environment and then respond to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The Open-Ended Stages of Concern (SoC) asks respondents to list their top five concerns about an innovation.

Hall, George and Rutherford (1979) profiled these concerns as seven stages ranging from 0 (Awareness) to 6 (Refocusing). Each concern statement on the SoC is read and assigned a score of 0-6. Qualitative measures used to gather data included informal interviews/conversations with teachers, administrators, and students; field notes; and accelerated team debriefing meetings.

Procedures

School 1: During the 1992-1993 school year, the accelerated schools team conducted all day staff-development sessions. Both the SLEQ and the SoC were administered at the beginning and end of the school year. Three independent raters were trained to assess the SoC and attained an inter-reliability of 0.86.

School 2: During the 1993-1994 school year, the accelerated schools team again conducted all day staff-development sessions. Three times during the year--September, February, and May--the SLEQ and the SoC were administered to the school faculty. Two trained scorers coded the responses of the SoC. Prior to analysis, the scorers attained a reliability of 0.87. Domain analysis (Patton, 1980) was used to assess concern statements, notes, and interviews.

Results and Discussion

School 1: Twenty-seven teachers and administrators completed the pre- and post-tests of the SLEQ and SoC. Results of a correlated t-test were not significant $t(26) = -0.37$, $p = .718$. McNemar's Test also produced no significant differences from the SoC $X (1, N=4) = 0.90$, $p>.05$. Inductive analysis generated four broad categories: 1) teacher characteristics, 2) intervening variables, 3) administration, and 4) communication.

Teacher characteristics emerged as the strength of the accelerated schools project. Teachers were, for the most part, open and comfortable in asking questions and willing to communicate about events happening around them.

The intervening variables category referred to events, individuals, or problems within the school that tended to slow down implementation/acceptance of the accelerated schools concept. Some teachers, for example, were seen as "active resistors" to the change process. Other school duties or tasks often imposed on the faculty resulted in a "crisis of time." A problem with the faculty cheerleader sponsor, for example, sparked a major upheaval in the school routine that detracted from the accelerated schools

agenda.

The category of administration could be listed as an intervening variable, but it was so powerful a force that it stood together as a separate entity. The accelerated schools coaches felt an overall lack of support from the school administrator as they attempted to serve as change agents. Examples included the lack of time set aside for accelerated schools training, a consistent failure to confirm specific dates for the accelerated schools coaches to provide training during inservice days, and a lack of follow-up by the administrator between site visits.

The final category, communication, emerged from the informal teacher conversations relating to instructions from their administrator. Some teachers expressed a degree of frustration over a perceived lack of clarity about the various steps or specifically what they were supposed to contribute to the process. Student questionnaires, for example, were requested, but one teacher did not know to whom or where they were to be returned.

School 2: Eighty-one teachers and administrators completed the three administrations of the SLEQ and SoC. Results from a repeated measures ANOVA produced no significant results. Results

of the repeated measures ANOVA did, however, reveal significant results on the SoC, $F(2,177)=10.108$; $p=0.000$. The Scheffe a posteriori procedure showed the significant differences occurred between time 1 and time 2, $F(2,174)=9.80$; $p=\leq 0.05$ and between time 1 and time 3, $F(2,174) = 8.50$; $p\leq 0.05$. Teacher concerns changed from concerns about self to concerns about particulars of completing the innovation. Inductive analysis also yielded four broad categories: 1) time commitment (to the process), 2) teacher commitment, 3) immediate impact on raising student test scores, and 4) teacher confusion/stress related to the process. The faculty, for example, were very concerned about the time demands of the accelerated schools process. Many comments revealed a concern about their colleague's wavering commitment to the accelerated schools model. Even though change takes time, the teachers clearly wanted immediate classroom benefits in raising their students' statewide achievement scores. Stress and confusion about an innovation inevitably accompanies change and teacher comments also reflected this element of the change process.

In both school sites, the qualitative data added a rich source of information that supported the statistical results attained from the

two quantitative instruments. Employing Donmoyer's (1990) framework for utilizing case studies, the research team noted that both school sites presented unique characteristics that ultimately, we concluded, led to their failure to fully embrace the accelerated schools model. School 1 involved the training team entering a process begun by a principal who had received training from Stanford, then decided to implement the process. Although empowerment coupled with responsibility is a tenet of the accelerated schools model, the teachers were "empowered" only as much as the principal permitted. Barrick (1988) indicates that if administrators are to encourage teacher leadership, they must share some authority traditionally within the "management purview." School 2 was already "under duress" having received a letter of concern from the state education agency regarding low test scores, particularly among minority students.

Quantitative data supported what the research team's "eyes revealed"--a lack of teacher involvement in the decision-making process (School 1) and a teacher mandate for immediate classroom benefits (School 2). Finally, the accelerated team learned that training cannot be effective unless: a) a community of learners

is willing to participate on a basis commensurate with the understanding that the first year is basically a training and preparation year paving the way for full implementation in year two, b) the school is totally committed to the process, c) the school has an administrative and environmental support system, d) the training team must have the support from the school administrator in order to serve as effective change agents, and e) there must be no external forces impacting on the school. These five items may have direct implications for future accelerated schools trainers when considering working with a school. All represent barriers to the success of the project and should be explored fully prior to any long-term commitment.

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